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Consumer Product SAFETY ALERT
FROM THE U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20207
December 1988

SEVENTY-SIX CHILDREN DIE IN NINE YEARS

CPSC Warns About Child Entrapment in Household Appliances And Picnic Coolers

From 1980 through November 1988, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has received reports of 76 suffocation deaths involving children who crawled inside latch type freezers (14 deaths), clothes dryers (5 deaths), combination washer/dryer units (3 deaths), picnic coolers (6 deaths), ice boxes in campers (3 deaths), and old-style latch type refrigerators (45 deaths). Most of the victims were four to seven years old. In all cases, the doors could not be easily pushed open from the inside. In some of the incidents associated with clothes dryers, the appliance was accidently turned on while the child was inside.

Frequently, the children were playing "hide-and-seek" and the appliance or chest provided a deceptively good place to hide. When the door slammed shut, the tight fitting gasket on most of the appliances cut off air to the child. This, along with the insulated construction of the appliance, also prevented the child's screams from being heard. But abandoned appliances are not the only items involved with accidents like these. Entrapment deaths have been reported in products in use or stored in the kitchen, laundry room, basement, or garage. Deaths also have occurred in ice boxes located in campers parked outside the home.

For the past thirty years, the Federal Refrigerator Safety Act has required that refrigerators be capable of being opened from the inside. Since then, manufacturers of various other appliances have voluntarily redesigned their products to provide safety doors or interlock devices that help prevent entrapment accidents. However, there are still some appliances in the home that do not have these safety features.

The CPSC recommends that you identify appliances or ice chests in your house, garage or recreational vehicles, which may present an entrapment hazard, and:

- Childproof old-style refrigerators and other appliances which are to be discarded or are in storage. The surest method is to take off the door completely and in most cases this is a simple process using a screwdriver. (It is unlawful in many local jurisdictions to discard old refrigerators without first removing the door.) If the door will not come off, remove or disable the latch completely so the door will no longer lock when closed. A third alternative is to fasten the door shut so it cannot be opened. (A chain and padlock can be used if the chain can be secured through the handles so it will not slide off. Strong filament tape wrapped around the appliance several times may be used temporarily. However, tape may deteriorate over time and need replacement.)
- Keep children away from old-style refrigerators, freezers, dryers or coolers still in use. Lock the door to your utility room and warn children not to play inside these appliances.
- If a child is missing, these appliances and picnic coolers should be among the first places checked. A few minutes may save the child's life.

For more information about safeguarding refrigerators and freezers, write to the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers (AHAM), 20 North Wacker Drive, Chicago, Illinois 60606. A leaflet is available free in quantities up to 1000.

To report an unsafe product or a product related injury, consumers may call the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's toll-free hotline number, 1-800-638-2772. The teletypewriter number for the hearing impaired is 1-800-638-8270; the Maryland TTY number is 1-800-492-8104.

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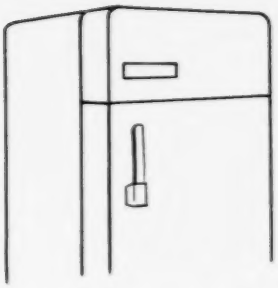
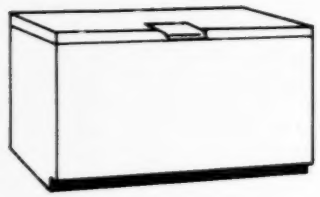
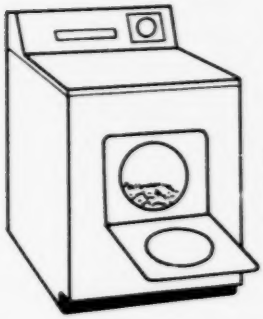


Old-Style Latch Refrigerators

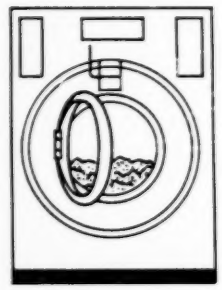


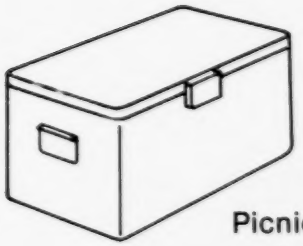
Freezers



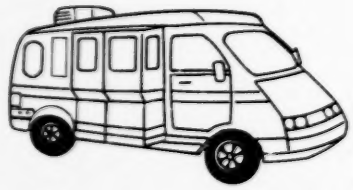
Clothes Dryers

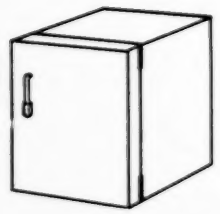
Washer/Dryer Combination





Picnic Coolers





Camper Ice Boxes

CPSC has received reports of 76 suffocation deaths of children (from 1980 through November 1988) who crawled inside these appliances or picnic coolers and could not easily escape. Frequently the children were playing hide-and-seek when one child climbed into the appliance or picnic cooler. If a child is missing, these appliances should be among the first places checked. Take the doors off those appliances not in use.